United Nations ST/IC/2010/34

Secretariat

14 December 2010

Information circular*

To: Members of the staff at Headquarters

From: The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management

Subject: **Language and communications programme at Headquarters — 2011**

1. Language courses in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish are organized to promote linguistic balance and multilingualism within the Secretariat and to improve the language capabilities of staff as mandated by the General Assembly in its resolutions 2480 B (XXIII), 43/224 D and 50/11. The courses provide the opportunity to learn the official languages of the Organization for use at work. For further career development, communications skills training provides hands-on practice for enhancing work-related writing and presentation skills.

2. The present circular includes information on registration procedures, the types of courses that are offered and the official policies of the United Nations Language and Communications Programme at Headquarters.

I. 2011 course calendar

3. The Language and Communications Programme offers three terms per year, which in 2011 are as follows:

January 2011 term

Language classes:	4 January-25 March
End-of-term examinations:	28 March-1 April

April 2011 term

Language classes:	18 April-8 July
End-of-term examinations:	11-15 July

* Expiration date of the present information circular: 31 December 2011.

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September 2011 term

Language classes: 12 September-2 December

End-of-term examinations: 5-9 December

II. Registration

4. United Nations staff members at Headquarters with contracts through the end of the term may register for language courses tuition-free, though students are responsible for purchasing any required textbooks or materials.

5. Those who are not United Nations staff members may still be eligible to take classes, either for free or at a low cost (see para. 17 below). Information on eligibility is available on the Language and Communications Programme registration page at www.un.org/depts/OHRM/sds/lcp.

Registration dates

6. Those eligible to take language classes may register in 2011 as follows:

Registration for the January 2011 term

1-19 November 2010

Registration for the April 2011 term

21 February-11 March 2011

Registration for the September 2011 term

6-17 June 2011 and

22 August-2 September 2011

7. Registration applications are processed on a first come, first served basis, and space in Language and Communications Programme courses is limited. Those who must have a particular course or schedule are advised to register early. After a course is full, subsequent applicants are put on a waiting list.

Registration procedures

8. There are three ways to register for language classes.

In-class registration

For current students in regular-level courses: participants in a regular-level course can register in class, before the end-of-term examination, to take a regular-level course in the following term. Those registering in this way will be given priority to ensure that they can continue in the regular programme. Those who do not register in class risk being unable to obtain a space in a class the following term.

Form-based registration

For new students, students returning after two terms and current students who wish to enrol in special courses: during the registration period, students may register by dropping off the following two documents in the box near room DC2-200 or room M-14001 at 380 Madison Avenue (14th floor):

(a) A copy of their grounds pass that is valid until the end of the upcoming term;[1]

(b) A completed registration form, which can be downloaded from the registration page of the Language and Communications Programme website at www.un.org/staffdevelopment/lcp.

In-person registration

During the registration period, students may register in person at the following times and locations:

(a) 1-3 p.m. in room DC2-200;

(b) 2.30-4.30 p.m. in room M-14001.

Placement exams

9. A student must take the placement exam for a language if he or she is:

(a) A non-native speaker who has some knowledge of the language. Only beginners may enrol directly in level 1. Those who can provide proof of a very high proficiency in the language may contact the coordinator of that language to request a waiver of the requirement to take this exam;

(b) A returning student who has not taken a course for two terms or more. On the registration form, students may choose between the option of taking the placement test in each language either "early" (two months before the upcoming term) or "late" (two weeks before).

Maximum number of courses per term

10. Students can register for up to two courses per term: one regular or accelerated course and one special course, or two special courses. Special permission from the coordinator is required to register for a third course. Also, students may take only one lunchtime course per day.

Focusing on a language

11. To ensure the most effective language learning possible, the Language and Communications Programme encourages a focus on one language at a time by requiring that:

[1] Students whose passes will expire before the end of the upcoming term are requested to provide a letter from their supervisor indicating that their contract will be extended until the end of the term.

(a) Students register for only one regular-level course per term. To study two languages simultaneously, students may take a regular-level course in one language and a special course in another in the same term.

(b) Students complete all regular-level courses in one language before taking a regular-level course in another language, unless they receive prior authorization from the head of the Language and Communications Programme.

Confirmation of enrolment

12. To confirm that they have been placed in a class, students are advised to check the class lists posted at www.un.org/staffdevelopment/lcp the week before the beginning of each term. After a course is full, those who register will be put on a waiting list. They will be contacted immediately if a space becomes available.

Cancellation of registration

13. To avoid paying an incomplete attendance fee (see para. 15 below), students are advised to cancel their registration early if they are likely to miss more than 25 per cent of the lessons of a course in which they are enrolled. Students may cancel by sending an e-mail to languages@un.org before the end of the first two weeks of an 8- or 12-week course, or before the end of the first week for shorter courses. No cancellation is permitted after the first two weeks of a class. For paying students, no tuition fees are refunded if registration is not cancelled by the given deadlines.

Absenteeism and no-show fee

14. Students who will be absent during the first week of their course (regardless of when their classes begin in the term) must inform their teachers and coordinators by e-mail of their planned absence. Those who do not inform their teachers and coordinators of their planned absence or who do not cancel their registration will be:

(a) Considered a no-show;

(b) Removed from the class list;

(c) Charged a no-show fee of $100 (this fee cannot be waived).

Incomplete attendance fee

15. To ensure that the Organization can provide training to the maximum number of staff who will be able to attend regularly, the Language and Communications Programme charges an incomplete attendance fee of $100 to students who wish to continue taking courses in the programme and who had low attendance in the previous term, that is, if they:

(a) Stopped attending a course after the first two weeks of the term without following the proper cancellation procedures;

(b) Attended less than 75 per cent of the course lessons.

16. Once per year only, the incomplete attendance fee may be waived if a student does any of the following:

(a) Leaves a gap of two terms before taking another course in any language;

(b) Provides a certificate of sick leave of three weeks or more which occurred during the course schedule;

(c) Submits an official letter from a supervisor indicating that the student:

(i) Was sent on a mission assignment of three weeks or more which he or she was not aware of at the time of registering for the class;

(ii) Had a change in work assignments that interfered with his or her ability to attend class.

Fees for paying students

17. Fees for each course are based on the number of hours of lessons as follows: 70 hours, $600; 60 hours, $550; 48 hours, $500; 36 hours, $450; 30 hours, $400; 24 hours, $300; 16 to 18 hours, $200; 12 hours, $150; and 6 to 8 hours, $100. For some courses, United Nations official holidays may affect the total number of hours.

III. Language courses

18. To help staff develop proficiency in a language, three types of language courses are offered each term: regular, accelerated and special.

Regular courses

19. Regular courses range from level 1 (beginner) to level 8 or 9 (advanced), depending on the language. These courses focus on all language skills — speaking, listening, writing and reading — and aim to develop both fluency and accuracy.

20. Regular courses meet for a total of three to five hours per week, depending on the language and level. Each lesson may last one, one and a half or two hours several times a week. Courses may be offered at the following times:

Before work: 8.30 a.m.

At lunch hour: 12 noon, 12.30 p.m., 1 p.m., 1.30 p.m. and 2 p.m.

After work: 5.30 p.m. (6 p.m. during the General Assembly session)

21. During most terms, there are only one or two schedule options per level per language.

22. To move to the next level, a student must pass both the written and oral parts of the end-of-term examination or alternative assessment (see paras. 35-38 below).

Accelerated courses

23. For those students who want to learn a language faster and have the time to do so, accelerated courses are offered as an intensive alternative to the regular programme, subject to demand. Classes meet for five days a week from 8.20 to 9.30 a.m.

Special courses

24. In response to student interest and need, and if classroom space is available, the Language and Communications Programme offers special courses that focus on a particular skill, task or topic. These courses meet for only one or two hours per week, and may last for fewer than 12 weeks.

IV. Communications skills training

25. Communications skills training aims to improve work-related writing and presentation skills in the working languages of the Organization, English and French. This responds to the recommendations of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the strategy for managing the Organization's human resources and other human resource management issues (see A/59/263).

26. Descriptions of these courses are provided in the Staff Development Programme booklet and on the Language and Communications Programme website at www.un.org/depts/OHRM/sds/lcp.

Eligibility

27. To participate in this training, the student must have a high level of proficiency in the language and have work duties that would allow him or her to immediately apply what he or she is learning. For example, to participate in a course on the principles of report writing, one must currently write United Nations reports for work.

Scheduling

28. Writing courses include a blend of both group lessons and individual tutoring sessions with the instructor.

29. Communications skills training may take place from 3 to 5 p.m. or from 5.30 to 7.30 p.m. (6 to 8 p.m. during the General Assembly) one day per week.

Department-specific training

30. Departments of the United Nations Secretariat with staff who perform writing or speaking tasks that differ from those of other United Nations staff, owing to specific guidelines, templates or other considerations, can request the Language and Communications Programme to assist with the development of specialized training.

Further information can be obtained by contacting the coordinator of the relevant language programme.

V. Additional information

Participants in lunchtime courses

31. Supervisors are requested to permit staff members who attend 60-minute classes during their lunch hour 20 minutes for a quick meal before resuming their work.

32. Staff members registering for lunchtime courses that meet for 90 minutes must request permission from their supervisors to attend. Staff members are requested to make arrangements to compensate for the 30 minutes beyond the traditional lunch break spent in the training session.

Absenteeism

33. If students are enrolled in a course and do not attend class during the first week, and they have not informed their teacher in writing of their planned absence, their name will be dropped from the class list, and the Language and Communications Programme may offer their space to someone on the waiting list.

Course materials

34. Course participants are responsible for purchasing any textbooks or course materials, as instructed by the teacher on the first day of class. Required textbooks may be available for purchase under special arrangements with vendors or in the United Nations bookshop, located in room GA-032A in the General Assembly building.

End-of-term examinations

35. End-of-term examinations are an integral and mandatory part of the regular courses of the Language and Communications Programme. If students miss an exam without informing the Programme first, it inconveniences their fellow students and the coordinator. Students are asked to be considerate. Participants who do not sit for the end-of-term examination will not be automatically enrolled in a regular course for the following term unless they submit an adequate written explanation to the appropriate coordinator.

36. Examinations are given after the last week of classes for regular and accelerated courses. To advance to the next level, students must pass both the written and oral components of the end-of-term examination, or a continuous evaluation if offered. Participants who fail the examination may arrange to have a general discussion of the results by making an appointment with the appropriate language coordinator one week after the beginning of a term.

37. If, owing to compelling and unavoidable circumstances, students cannot take the examination as scheduled and wish to request a make-up examination, they must submit a written justification to the coordinator of the language they are studying.

38. Participants who choose to repeat a level irrespective of their grade on the final examination should inform their teacher accordingly at the end of the course period in order to be re-enrolled at the same level. An incomplete attendance fee will be charged only if the attendance requirements have not been met.

Language proficiency examination

39. The United Nations language proficiency examination, administered by the Examination and Tests Section, is the official test of a staff member's knowledge of a language and may be taken both by participants who have completed the highest level of Language and Communications Programme regular courses in a language and by staff members who have achieved proficiency by other means. To find out more about the examination and how to apply to take the exam, students may go to www.un.org/exam/lpe.

VI. Enquiries

40. For general enquiries and information, students may contact the Language and Communications Programme:

(a) In person, Monday-Thursday at

(i) DC2-200, 1 to 3 p.m.;

(ii) 380 Madison (14th floor), room M-14001 A and B, 2.30 to 4.30 p.m.;

(b) By e-mail, to languages@un.org, especially to update their contact information;

(c) By phone, to 917 367 2623

(i) Ms. Maria Catherina David-Dakay, Staff Development Assistant;

(ii) Mr. Joseph Vukas, Training Assistant;

(d) By fax, to M-14001 A and B, at 212 963 6016.

41. For pedagogical enquiries or to arrange appointments, please contact:

Arabic Programme Coordinator: Ms. Samia Montasser, 212 963 9506

Chinese Programme Head Teacher: Mr. Yong Ho, 212 963 2481

English Programme Coordinator: Ms. Kathryn Good, 212 963 3820

French Programme Coordinator: Mr. Jérôme Quentin, 917 367 2693

Russian Programme Head Teacher: Ms. Alla Padalka, 212 963 7063

Spanish Programme Acting Coordinator: Mr. Felipe Martín Sarachaga, 212 963 3329

The office hours of language coordinators are posted outside DC 2-200 and at 380 Madison (13th floor), in room M-14001 A and B.

42. For additional enquiries, contact:

Mr. Emmanuel Soyer, officer in charge of the Language and Communications Programme, 212 963 7019.